The Dark Side of Human Resources Management: The Perceptions of Different Organizational Actors

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> Sometimes I wonder whether the world is being run by smart people who are putting us on or by imbeciles who really mean it.
> —Mark Twain

Abstract Fundamental as it is that HR managers work as team leaders and potenciate the creation of friendly and stimulating environments, increasing attention has been given lately to malpractices of Human Resources Management (HRM) by researchers, organizations and public opinion. As part of a broader project that aims to understand the perceptions and the attributions of different types and situations of malpractices in HRM, this aims to understand how the way in which the position of HR Director is exercised, and its influences on the performance of other management positions, can give rise to poor HRM strategies, behaviors, and situations. In this study, 60 interviews were conducted with organizational actors, and Grounded Theory was applied to analyze the data. The interviewees were employed at 3 Portuguese companies and held different hierarchical positions: peers of HR managers and employees from different organizational functions. This study contributes to unveiling the dark side of HRM. The findings highlight that the little respect for the values and the demagogy of the discourse about the importance of people as the most valuable capital of an organization leads, in face of what is practiced on a daily basis, to a diminishing of HRM, the HR department, managers and the organization. The study calls for a deep understanding of those malpractices in order to allow the flourishing of best practices in HRM, in particular for stimulating creative and innovative teams, such as the creation of a team coaching staff in organizations.

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1   Introduction

In an ideal world leaders, including Human Resources (HR) Directors, would stimulate their teams and company collaborators by creating emotionally safe conditions and opportunities for those to express their intrinsic motivation (Graen et al. 2020). The authors Graen et al. (2020) propose a set of best practices for HRM, in particular for stimulating creative and innovative teams. Among these practices is the creation of a team coaching staff responsible to deliver advanced practices in projects (Graen et al. 2020). However, to achieve this goal for best practices in Human Resources Management (HRM), it is still necessary to unveil and debate malpractices that persist in the daily life of companies.

Although issues and behaviors related with malpractices of HRM are not a novelty within HRM research, the fact is that increasing attention has been given lately to this topic by researchers, organizations, and public opinion (Crawshaw 2009; Einarsen et al. 2003; Eurofound 2014; Fahie and Devine 2014; Martinko et al. 2013; Tepper 2007).

The issues raised by malpractices in HRM confirms and reinforces the distance between rhetoric and practice in the value attributed to persons and their management. This gap happens in all kinds of organizations and manifests itself through a wide range of practices and organizational internal realities (Bernotaute and Malinauskiene 2017; Eurofound 2014; Hershcovis 2011; Legge 1995; Morten and Einarsen 2018).

The present study is part of a broader project that aims to understand the perceptions and the attributions of different types and situations of malpractices in the domain of management in general and in HRM in specific. The project addresses the following research question: What type, nature, attributions, and enhancers of malpractices in HRM different organizational actors of diverse hierarchical and functional levels perceive in their organizations?

In this study, the objective is to understand how the way in which the position of HR Director is exercised, and its influences on the performance of other management positions, can give rise to poor HRM strategies, behaviors, and situations. Thus, this study contributes to unveiling the dark side of HRM (Einarsen et al. 2019; Guest 2017; Krasikova et al. 2013; Tepper et al. 2017).

To develop this study, 60 interviews with different organizational actors were used, and Grounded Theory was applied to analyze the data. The interviewees were employed at three Portuguese companies and represented different hierarchical positions: peers of HR managers and employees from different organizational functions.

It was intended to address through the interviews the opinions, perceptions regarding strategies, behaviors, and situations that, from the perspective of different actors from different companies, were perceived as generators/enhancers of less appropriate or very inadequate behaviors and situations in relation to HRM. The analysis of the data highlight aspects such as lack of consistency between values, principles, policies, and daily practices. This lack of coherence was explicitly contextualized in the lack of concrete action by HRM specialists—director, technicians, and

other employees of the HR Department—but also, and mainly, in some peer directors of the HR director and middle and line managers who take on professional behaviors perceived as examples of what should never happen in HRM.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. The next section presents a brief outline of the literature on malpractices of HRM. The methodology of the study and a description of the participants are presented in the subsequent section. Next, different organizational actors' opinions and perceptions regarding strategies, behaviors, and situations that were perceived as generators/enhancers of less appropriate or very inadequate behaviors and situations in relation to HRM are analyzed. The final section offers a discussion and conclusion.

2 Theoretical Underpinnings

Referring "malpractices in HRM" implies to understand that this subject is positioned in the realm of people's judgment and perceptions, particularly employees regardless of their hierarchical and functional level. Within this topic, and as argued by Tepper (2000, p. 178), a growing body of research has explored abusive supervision, "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact".

When studying malpractices in HRM the aim is to analyze problematical behaviors, such as mobbing; bullying; sexual and physical harassment; discrimination; depreciation of somebody's work; psychological terrorism; and victimization (Crawshaw 2009; Einarsen et al. 2003; Hershcovis 2011; Khoo 2010; Morten and Einarsen 2018). But it is also important to consider in these malpractices subtle behaviors, which are equally perverse and harmful to human dignity, such as criticism; intimidation; veiled threats; humiliation; exclusion; disruption of social interactions; disciplinary proceedings based on false accusations; public ridicule; lies about the person, configured in what is abusive supervision (Eurofound 2014; Khoo 2010; Tepper et al. 2006).

This is also a research topic where the possibility of personal, group and institutional exploitation must be considered, what calls for further research from different locations and cultures (Bernotaute and Malinauskiene 2017; Guest 2017; Harris et al. 2007; Kowalski and Loretto 2017; Morten and Einarsen 2018; Tepper 2007).

There is a dark side in management and in HRM that cause pain, various disorders, sleep disturbance, exhaustion, anxiety, depression, loss of self-esteem, stress, burnout, and even violent deaths (Aborde de Chatillon and Richard 2015; Astrauskaite et al. 2010; Bernotaute and Malinauskiene 2017; Daniels et al. 2017; Fahie and Devine, 2014; Hershcovis 2011; Tepper et al. 2017). This dark side is present in the news, such as the suicides, while others do not become public, laying under the iceberg tip. Increasing research on these issues is stimulated by the costs, financial and non-financial, for organizations caused by abusive behaviors. In a society ruled by numbers and statistics, it is easy to forget that living things bleed and in this specific case it is people we are talking about (Bernotaute and Malinauskiene

2017; Eurofound 2014; Harris et al. 2007; Morten and Einarsen 2018; Tepper 2007). As argued by Burton et al. (2014, p.871), "Understanding how employees come to believe they have been abused is important not only in light of the substantial social and financial costs of abuse but also because employees can vary considerably in how they perceive supervisors' actions".

Malpractices in HRM is a current, pertinent, sensitive, politically and socially incorrect theme, often hidden by shame, lack of practical proof, emotional or physical blackmail, and fear (Bernotaute and Malinauskiene 2017; Morten and Einarsen 2018). A theme concealed in conferences, premiered in lectures where one tries to give an almost perfect, if not idyllic, picture of organizational environments, where in reality there is a dark side of management that wants to be bleached, with more or less innovative forms of organizational eclipses or total darkness (Bernotaute and Malinauskiene 2017; Morten and Einarsen 2018). However, these malpractices have impact on employees and their perception of justice, with previous research showing "that perceptions of abusive supervision diminish employees' perceptions of justice" (Burton et al. 2014, p. 895; see also Bernotaute and Malinauskiene 2017; Burton and Hoobler 2011; Einarsen et al. 2019; Guest 2017; Khoo 2010; Teixeira et al. 2011; Tepper 2000).

The study of organizational cynicism and manipulative and abusive relationships has been focusing on organizational policies in general, and in particular HRM and leadership, namely their lack of adequacy and quality (Davis and Gardner 2004; Einarsen et al. 2019; Guest 2017).

Different aspects discredit holders of management positions mainly in the management of people and teams, such as lack of quality and clarity in the manager-worker relationship, along with role ambiguities and hierarchical and functional responsibilities; distance between managers and workers; deficient and not very transparent communication systems; organizational cynicism and the perceived lack of technical and practical knowledge and behavioral skills (Atwater et al. 2000; Davis and Gardner 2004; Einarsen et al. 2019; Guest 2017; Katz and Kahn 1978; Krasikova et al. 2013; Valle and Perrewe 2000).

3   Methodology

This study is part of a broader investigation developed under an interpretative paradigm by assuming that reality is a social construction and cannot be understood independently from the actors that create that reality (Urquhart 2013). The empirical study is based on qualitative research designed to understand phenomena through the meanings that individuals attribute to them (Myers 2011). The original study used interviews to collect data; 60 interviews were conducted with different organizational actors, and Grounded Theory was used to analyze the data. The interviewees were employed at three Portuguese companies and were at different hierarchical levels: peers HR managers, and employees from different organizational functions. These companies are mainly large companies and leaders in their fields of business and

Table 1 Classification of the data sample

Business clusters	Activity	Number of interviews by company
Portuguese Companies	Industrial	25
	Technology	25
	Commercial	26

were selected only companies with an HR department and an HR manager who is hierarchically and/or functionally subordinate to an administrator, general manager or superior general HR manager.

The theme of this study was not the objective of the global project, however, when it appeared spontaneously in these companies, it was understood by the relevance of the subject to develop and deepen it. As argued by Laperrière (2010), this study, focused on malpractices of HRM, constitutes a marginal case that gained central importance, by revealing a crucial aspect of the researched phenomenon.

The companies' classification, sectors of activity, and the number of interviews conducted are described in Table 1.

The interviewees covered a broad age range, from 19 to 82 years of age, and labor seniority, ranging from 3 months to 67 years, and were at different stages of their careers. The gender distribution of the interviewees was balanced across professional categories. Most of the interviews were carried out between 2007 and 2012. Given the changes in the financial and political conditions of the Portuguese context that occurred after the interviews were transcribed, additional interviews were conducted between 2013 and 2015 and confirmed the previous results.

In terms of data analysis, it should be noted that the domains created and categories are contextualized by reference to situations experienced or witnessed in their companies by the interviewees. The higher prevalence of reports and testimonies of this particular type of HRM activity is mentioned in three larger national companies by undifferentiated workers in the operational and administrative areas (12 interviewees), some line managers (6 interviewees), technical staff (6 interviewed), and some testimonies from peer directors of the HR director (36 interviewees).

4 Malpractices in HRM: Some Perceptions

Based on the interviewees' perception, it can be highlighted that exists a dark side within HRM reality. The perceptions about malpractices in HRM emerge from the interviews when the participants related effective situations. According to the analysis of the data, malpractices in HRM are associated with six dimensions: *perception of HRM*;*perception about the HR director and other managers*;*perception of determinants of the position of HR Director*;*perception of internal relationships and interpersonal interactions in the company*,*perception of HRM practices*. This chapter

is focused on the following dimensions: *perception of HRM*;*perception about the HR director and other managers; perception of determinants of the position of HR Director*.

4.1 First Dimension: Perception of HRM

In the dimension of *perception of HRM,* the results refer to one domain designed *basic principles of HRM* with two categories: relevance given to values and perception of coherence between rhetoric and practice, as presented in Table 2.

Regarding the *role of values* characteristic, there are 29 references, out of 60 possible, that state that although the values are considered very relevant, as they act as guidelines for behaviors, the reality is that they are perceived as something that:

> ... easily put aside. That is, people may have some purposes of following the values, but, more often than not, this aspect is no longer a priority, soon forgotten ... leaders should set an example but on the contrary. There are some here that are truly averse to following principles and coordinating their team following values ... (Technical Employee).

Regarding the *degree of perceived importance* characteristic, in 60 interviewees 33 references emerge in which the dominant perception is that "the values here in the company are often a dead letter" (Undifferentiated Operational Employee).

The second category that results from the data in a very prominent way has to do with the *perception of coherence between rhetoric and practice* in HRM. (42 refs). At this level, the data highlights one of HRM's chronically current issues, the gap between the discourse on the importance of people and the organizational reality. This gap exists mainly in the daily implementation of HRM practices and actions, embodied in the behaviors assumed by some of its protagonists. The characteristic underlying this category has to do with the *degree of consistency in HRM*, in which the following transcript exemplifies this perception and opinion: "In speech we are placed in the heart and in practice we are cannon fodder, unfortunately this is the truth" (Undifferentiated Operational Employee).

Table 2 First domain: basic principles of HRM

Categories	Characteristics	Perceptions
Relevance given to values	Role of values Degree of perceived importance	"Something that is easily put aside" "worthless piece of paper"
Perception of coherence between rhetoric and practice	Degree of consistency in HRM	gap between discourse and practical activities

4.2 Second Dimension: Perception About the HR Director and Other Managers

In the dimension designed by *perception about the HR director and other managers*, the results show three domains: *structural and hierarchical position of HRM*, *leadership of the diferent types of managers*, and *academic qualificationof the HR director*.

Regarding the first domain, there are some associated categories, as shown in Table 3.

The category linked to top management (41 refs) presents the characteristics of degree, nature, and type. In terms of degree, the perception is expressed not so much in relation to the greater or lesser distance between the HR director and the top managers of the company, but more in the quality of this type of relationship, resulting from the analysis of the data the balanced position that should exist in that relationship.

The opinion of a significant number of the interviewees (28 out of 60) can be summarized in the following quote, which shows the appropriate dimension of the relationship, but also what happens when the HR department does not function as a guarantor of impartiality and fair treatment:

> The HR director should have a lot of support from the top management ... I am talking in terms of what I think here at the company. In theory and in practice, I understand that a company must respect its workers and be consistently fair in the way they manage them and here the HR director must have an essential role. It is not, in practical terms, as I mentioned, what I actually see in this company. I believe that the link between top management and the HR director must be effectively close and supportive. But the principles and policies that link them must be in line with impartiality and justice, without jeopardizing the company's success, the quality of life of workers and their happiness, which in my view are not incompatible aspects. Now if the management says kill and the HR director, and his associates, say skinning, there is nothing good about this relationship, and we are the ones suffering because it's always the little guy who gets the raw deal, for many old wives' tales they tell or want to tell. I also tell you that sometimes management thinks and does one thing and at lower levels, for the sake of affirming their little power, they do it differently and it seems that the truth is not like oil, it takes forever before it reaches the top ... we died before. (Undifferentiated Administrative Employee)

Table 3 First domain: structural and hierarchical position of HRM

Categories	Characteristics	Perceptions
Relationship with top management	Degree	Level of proximity to top management
	Nature	Excessive bonding to top management Instrumental use of the relationship with top management Lack of courage in making business decisions Convenience positioning
	Type	Instrumental opportunity Partial orientation

It also follows from the data and the previous quote that, in terms of HRM performance, the interviewees, although they manage to differentiate the performance (or inactivity) of the HR director, tend to see decisions in HR matters associated with other actors with management responsibilities, whether they are peer directors of the HR director or line managers. The data reveal that the HR director's inadequate perception "creditor of certain abusive behaviors that should not occur". (Undifferentiated Administrative Employee)

In terms of the nature of the positioning, the perception is that

> … there is a tendency for the HR director not to face many of the situations head-on, I mean clearly the most controversial, unpopular as you want to call it and safeguard himself in "them", like: «it was the management that decided, it has to be like this ». In my opinion, this type of posture discredits the position and the function, puts himself in a position of minority and as a rubber stamp, without a voice, crouching in front of the Administration. (Suj. Quadro Técnico) (31 refs out of 60)

Data analysis reveals that regarding the nature of positioning, the most common perceptions are excessive bonding to top management, instrumental use of the relationship with top management, and lack of courage in making business decisions, *"so as not to have to face the decisions that have to be taken"* (Undifferentiated Operational Employee) or become strongly associated with those decisions. These perceptions contribute to the discrediting and devaluation of the professional role of the HR director and, in turn, this deletion favors the existence of bad HR management behaviors, which tend to pass unscathed.

The transversality of HRM between the different management positions is also revealed here, as it also emerges from the data that "when it comes to bad news, the boss tells us to talk to HR" or "these situations are the responsibility of the HR management, I don't even agree, but they in HR want it that way". Thus, there is a perception of not taking responsibility for people or teams when "things are less good" (Technical Employee).

In the second domain, *leadership of the different types of managers*, the categories that emerge were designated by *leadership style* (47 refs) and *leadership exercise* (48 refs), as shown in Table 4. The similarity of references reveals an identical perception in terms of the listed categories.

Regarding the leadership style, data appear as shown in the following quote:

Table 4 Second domain: leadership of the different types of managers

Categories	Characteristics	Perceptions
Leadership style	Assigned components and their designations	Passivity and fade away Abuse of the leadership position Abuse and discrimination
Leadership exercise	Form of leadership exercise Determinants leadership exercise	"Non-leadership" and/or "Schizophrenic leadership" Insecurity, ignorance, and lack of competence

There is a book by Mintzberg that, if I'm not mistaken, the title is «Less MBA's, More Managers» and what I see, and which you will find paradoxical in view of the position I have and the fact that I let go and don't do nothing… I acknowledge that in fact I do nothing because I am in a delicate moment of my life here at the company, as they are negotiating with me to terminate my contract by mutual agreement, and it is a very delicate and complex situation… but the truth is that, and believe that it is not because I am in the situation that I am in that I tell you this, it is difficult for me to see certain actions taken by some managers, who fell in favor of the gods and do and undo at their own pleasure, destroy much of the company's assets in terms of credibility, seriousness, image; they don't bother to mess up people's lives to the point of making it hell. The number of casualties confirms this situation, there are things that are not even worth talking about, very serious in terms of health (tears)..., and they still have plenty of time. I speak of heads who manage their areas and their people more in the style of animals than people. In my view, the company was filled with MBAs, boys and girls who have been trapping and literally cleaning up the existing critical sense, we are creating a set of management dictators… I have nothing against the MBAs, I have a son making one and I hope the title doesn't go to his head, but I don't put my hands on the fire anymore. In fact, the truth is that in terms of leadership everything is said and if only they were managers ..., but their attitudes and behaviors are unharmed and, of course, the HR director cannot do well in this photo because he often appears in it all smiling. (Manager Peer)

There are 26 interviewees who express ideas similar to those in the transcript. Thus, leaders perceived as being based on passivity and fade away are translated into the word "disappearance" of the director in the face of different situations. In contrast, 18 of the 26 interviewees also express the idea of managers who stand out for the abusive use of leadership positions translated into behavior of arrogance and discrimination.

Regarding the *leadership exercise* category, two characteristics of the data analysis emerge very explicitly: the *form* and the *determinants of the leadership exercise.* Regarding the form, the perception that comes up most often is the arrogance in the exercise of functions, which leads some interviewees to speak of "non-leadership" (Undifferentiated Employee). There are also references such as "To terrorize and discriminate is not to lead" (Undifferentiated Employee), and "Dealing with people with insults and disrespecting and trampling is not for a leader, it is someone who thinks 'I want, I can and I command'" (Qualified Technical Employee). Another aspect regarding the exercise of leadership is the consideration of a schizophrenic way of leading. This idea can be translated into the following quote: *"When you order something and its opposite, when you ask for something and it is done exactly as it was requested and then it is simply destroyed, in the literal sense of the term, kicking or verbally, you cannot be in perfect judgment, this is crazy…"* (Undifferentiated Administrative Employee) (11 refs out of 60). Some of the interviewees use besides "schizophrenic" the word "autstic" (7 refs).

Insecurity, ignorance, and lack of competence emerge in the determinants, which can condition and lead to an overbearing exercise of the leadership of some managers and which is illustrated in the following transcript:

… Leadership is something that cannot described, because what exists is a tyrannical way of exercising power and, in my opinion and I certainly will not be the only one, this power is exercised in this way to compensate for insecurities, ignorance, unpreparedness and even

Table 5 Third domain: academic qualification of the HR director

Categories	Characteristics	Perceptions
Type of school education	Degree and area of training	Exercise of the positions markedly ideological and biased prejudice, result of the academic background
Consequences of different school backgrounds	Degree of suitability	Blurred and misadjusted academic perspective of reality

> fear. I refer to managers who do what they want and who in HRM are a disaster and the greater the disaster the greater the tyranny… (Undifferentiated Operational Employee) (31 refs).

In the *academic qualificationof the HR director* domain, the categories that arise have to do with the *type of school education* and the main *consequences of different school backgrounds*, as in Table 5.

At this level, the analysis of the data reveals that some interviewees, despite assuming that it is important for HR directors to have higher education, question that same higher education through the opinions they express:

> …To what extent does the higher education acquired allow future professionals in this area to have a comprehensive, integrative and as inclusive view as possible about people management issues? That is, the extent to which higher education is structured so that future leaders have a management conscience in which all people count or, on the contrary, higher education is structured to train professionals with a markedly ideological and prejudiced matrix, focused only on the interests of the company. (Technical Employee)

Regarding the *consequences of different school backgrounds* category, a characteristic called *degree of suitability* of higher education to business reality emerges. The idea transmitted by 26 interviewees is that school education "is out of touch with reality", "is too dark when students action scenarios are already very black" (Undifferentiated Operational Employees).

In terms of data analysis, the question that arises in this domain and goes through the two categories mentioned above is related not so much to the type, area and consequences of higher education, but to the way in which the knowledge resulting from that higher education is properly implemented in practice. From the interviews carried out in the three national companies that have served to illustrate and analyze ways of exercising HRM, the following transcript is highlighted regarding the level of desirable in terms of higher education:

> It is essential that the HR director, regardless of the titles and academic degrees he has, has the ability to see, hear and feel. Be alert. Knowing how to listen in the midst of noise and seeing in the middle of smoke is not taught in colleges and courses. Unfortunately, not being able to understand the symptoms of arrogant behaviors is also not taught, but it should be, as it would certainly avoid certain behaviors that are often destructive of the value created and would encourage behaviors that would be a stimulus for the development of companies and for the involvement of all those who work at the company. (Technical Employee) (34 refs out of 60)

According to the data, it appears that this lack of adequacy of school education to practical reality has the following main consequences: enhancing the partiality of the HR director and HRM; foster corporate hypocrisy by employees who have leadership responsibilities and other organizational actors; and, increase business distrust, as in the following transcripts:

> I can't imagine how many times I feel that they treat me with hypocrisy and I put on a smile that no matter how much I want to hide it is always yellow ... it is a case of saying that hypocrisy with hypocrisy pays off. When I feel like I give everything and my colleagues too and we are treated cynically and hypocritically, by hypocritical people, whom I neither recognize competence nor values, but just because they have the king in their belly they think they can treat us like doormats, this it is not good for my health or for the company…
> (Undifferentiated Operational Employee) (17 refs)

> … Training is very important, but more important in my opinion is what we do with it and from it. In some cases, what I see at the highest level, and I am talking about people with management positions, to make it clear is not the HR director, but other directors who do, undo, redo at their pleasure. People who lie, harm the company, create a climate of fear such that in management meetings no one speaks. … sometimes I think their eyes will pop out, such is the verbal, psychological and even physical violence, kicking the poor furniture that it is impossible for anyone to say anything. I already talked to whoever had to speak and I think they left me with the grenade in my hands, without a peg and captured. I ask: higher education for what? The company where I started fit in the reception and we were half a dozen, but it was classy. This has already been, but has been living in this environment, and then I no longer understand the position, power or attention of the HR director. Doesn't he see or doesn't he want to see!? I just want the time to get out of here (Manager Peer).

4.3   Third Dimension: Perception of Determinants of the Position of HR Director

There is one domain that results from the analysis of the interviews in this dimension, which has to do with the *perception of the position of the HR director*. In the Portuguese companies analyzed, there was a greater number of references by different actors to situations characterized as "… bad or very bad HRM" (Undifferentiated Operational Employee). These perceptions strongly affect the perception of the HR director and other actors with hierarchical and functional responsibilities in this area of management.

The perception of the position of the HR director emerges as transversal to the three participating companies. This situation can be illustrated by the following transcript:

> What I can tell you is that it is almost impossible not to find companies where at one time or another in their existence they have not had a moment of rotten peace generalized or even circumscribed to a certain area. Of course, when I talk about rotten peace, I mean the climate that is established between workers of the same company in the performance of their duties and as such it has a lot to do with human interactions and consequently with HRM. In my opinion, the HR director should act as an element of detection and search for solutions that aim to eliminate this type of environment, however the reality that I know shows me that sometimes the greatest difficulty is in being able to diagnose this climate of rotten peace. The image is a little harsh, but I compare the rotten peace to a cancer that can often progress

Table 6 First domain: perception of the position of the HR director

Categories	Characteristics	Perceptions
Characteristics of the HR Director position	Requirements for the position	Deficit of social skills
	Supremacy of individual logic over group and company logic	Narrative contrary to "flying the flag of the company"
	Behaviors of the HR director resulting from the exercise of the position	Obsessive and aggressive verbal behaviors Breach of trust in the direction and director of HR Discredited in many HR practices Lack of empathy and business solidarity Abuses of power, sexual and moral harassment and psychological terrorism
Limitations arising from the exercise of the position	Suppression of critical thinking	"You are here to work and not to think"

silently, without symptoms worthy of highlight and when it manifests itself it is already fatal. (Manager Peer)

In the domain of this third dimension, perception of the position of the HR director, two categories are identified, each with different characteristics, as shown in Table 6.

Regarding the first category designated as *characteristics of the HR director position* (34 refs out of 60) and its first characteristic—*requirements for the position*—in the analysis carried out in these three companies, the perception goes beyond the required profile. What emerges from the data in relation to the requirements, also designated by the interviewees by competencies, is in accordance with the following quote:

… the existence of a deficit in social skills, namely in terms of the quality of interaction management, communication management and, essentially, expectations management. People are concerned about their lives and about their benefits and their rights. Here many of those who say that workers only know how to talk about rights, you should see and hear them in private, because in fact they only talk about their rights, benefits and incentives. We talk about overtime that they don't want to pay us, and at the top level what we hear, in a blatant and scandalous way, is the cylinder capacity of the car assigned by the company, the limit and the color of the credit card, the size of the office, the quality of the laptop and the capabilities and design of the mobile phone. And, of course, the HR director puts himself in the same perspective and takes care of his life. Of course, these types of situations are unfair, but it says a lot about the management mindset. Cows are always skinny for them, but chubby and dairy for the usual ones. At least there should be a minimum of decorum and discretion. In relation to the HR director, he follows the same gauge as the others, so anyone who doesn't want to be a wolf should not wear his skin. (Undifferentiated Operational Employee, finalist of a degree in HRM)

The second characteristic—supremacy of individual logic over group and company logic—is the opposite of the "flying the flag of the company" narrative, and can be substantiated in the expression by an undifferentiated administrative employee:

> … flying the flag of the company at all time is nothing when compared to what is required of us by certain company leaders. They pay us for our work, but most of the time they don't pay us for the extra hours we work, so flying the flag of the company is one thing, leaving the skin on and getting screaming and bad manners isn't a fair price, don't you The department and the HR director don't see, don't hear, don't know? However, if one of us says he can't work overtime, he is immediately called or threatened with the HR director. Of course, I even admit that he may not know and that his position and person are used to pressure and frighten. There is still a lot of mentality that fear is an excellent way to motivate ..., but the HR director should know how to identify these situations and act, in fact, he gets the fame! (14 refs out of 15 undifferentiated administrative and operational employees).

Regarding the third characteristic–*behaviors of the HR director resulting from the exercise of the position* (34 refs)—the perception that exists, which according to some interviewees results from what they heard from the HR director himself in different contexts, is the existence of obsessive and aggressive verbal behaviors to achieve results at any cost, as transcribed below

> This dictatorship of results at any price leads to disrespect for personal and professional dignity, with the increase in dismissals. The fact that there is more work force available leads, in terms of recruitment and selection practices, to the use of cheap and unskilled labor and situations of contractual precariousness, which has everything to go wrong. … In fact, people already work in some companies that I know without receiving any remuneration and I am not thinking about overdue wages, they simply do not receive, they are young and the parents pay food, transportation, for them to work. … The famous professional internships… and I believe this is going to get worse, I would like to be mistaken, but as I told you, this is taking a course that has everything to end badly. (Technical Employee)

In terms of perceived behaviors, there is also: *breach of trust in the direction and director of HR* (23 refs); *discredited in many HR practices* (29 refs) seen as ways of homogenizing workers and putting pressure on them; *lack of empathy and business solidarity* (37 refs), and finally, the existence of

> … abuses of power, sexual and moral harassment and psychological terrorism that I never thought I would see on the part of managers appointed with pomp and circumstance by the company's senior officials. … now you think I say this out there, of course not, even if I had one another guaranteed job, because if those who can do it don't do it, am I going to be the savior of the country?! But there is still worse than that in other companies and nothing ever happens, the victims are the ones who end up being fired. (Undifferentiated Operational Employee).

As for the second category in this domain—*limitations arising from the exercise of the position* (18 refs)—it has a characteristic: suppression of critical thinking, expressed in the following quote:

> It is our daily bread to hear the phrase "you are here to work and you are not here to think", of course this is an excellent way to motivate, to involve, to engage people in the company's goals. The most cynical of all this is that after forbidding us to think, they hire a company

or someone to come and give us self-motivation training. Or the managers will all learn to motivate their teams, or consultancy companies will come and interview us to find out what we think. Extraordinary, not even Tarantino remembered to conceive and film this type of dialogue. (Undifferentiated Operational Employee)

The data reveal that more important than the position and the role associated with the HR director is the way in which this position and associated role is exercised, and also, the way in which it can directly or indirectly influence the exercise of practices and HR management actions by other organizational actors with management positions.

5 Conclusion

The identification of malpractices of HRM may and should work not as way to only bring to light what is wrong, but as a way to learn how to improve and innovate in HRM practices, such as coaching as a way to enhance psychological safety and drive organizational effectiveness (Graen et al. 2020). It is fundamental that HR managers work as team leaders and potenciate the creation of friendly and stimulating environments. This study focused on understanding how the way in which the position of HR Director is exercised, and its influences on the performance of other management positions, can give rise to poor HRM strategies, behaviors, and situations. The study calls for a deep understanding of those malpractices in order to allow the flourishing of best practices in HRM, in particular for stimulating creative and innovative teams, such as the creation of a team coaching staff in organizations.

The position of HR director is highlighted by the interviewees taking into account what the HR director does, why he does it and what he does it for, but in many of the transcripts presented, it is marked by its deletion, disappearance, lack of management assertiveness. This results in a perception of complicity, albeit by inaction, in relation to certain situations and behaviors of poor HRM.

The cross-cutting of HRM across different hierarchical levels leads, according to the data, to the fact that HR responsibilities may be assumed by managers with little technical knowledge and little behavioral skills, in an area of management where, according to many of the interviewees, it will be necessary to have well-trained people at all levels.

The little respect for the values and the demagogy of the discourse about the importance of people as the most valuable capital of an organization leads, in face of what is practiced on a daily basis, to a diminishing of HRM, the HR department, managers and the organization. These circumstances create a favorable environment for "I want, I can and I command" and for the destructive powers in which the only prevailing logic is that of personal interest (Hershcovis 2011; Krasikova et al. 2013; Tepper et al. 2017).

Aggressive, offensive, discriminatory, abusive, destructive, persecutory behaviors, which disrespect the citizenship and dignity of the worker and the person, translate into anxiety, stress, various diseases and disorders, absenteeism and high

turnover. These behaviors and their implications associated with the impunity of those responsible, generate perceptions that in turn discredit the company and make it a place to avoid or leave the company as soon as possible (Hershcovis 2011; Krasikova et al. 2013; Morten and Einarsen 2018; Tepper et al. 2017). In addition, precarious work can generate the feeling that workers are "flying the flag of the company", because they stay and work there. However, the reality may be, judging by the data obtained, that people return the next day because they have no other work alternatives and continue to have commitments and bills to pay at the end of each month (Workplace Bullying Institute 2014).

The fact that the companies analyzed in this study have an HR department and an HR director necessarily raises expectations regarding this area of management, especially since some of the interviewees came from previous work experiences where these policies and practices were not formalized. These expectations were reflected in statements about the real importance of having an "HR management with pomp and circumstance", assuming itself as the guarantor of good practices in the company and ensuring that workers and managers, having different goals and expectations, can contribute to the sustained development of the organization as a whole (Guest 2017; Hershcovis 2011; Krasikova et al. 2013; Tepper et al. 2017).

The greatest limitation of this work results from the fact that the sample is limited and above all because this theme was not foreseen in the original research project. It resulted from the spontaneity of the interviewees. Accordingly, a proposal for future research is to deepen the data obtained and have this theme as the central focus of an investigation in the Portuguese reality and with different types of organizations involved.

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